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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 3118  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0933  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0807  
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 1383  
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001367

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: NO PROGRESS ON REGISTRATION DURING  
VATICAN OFFICIALS' VISIT

REF: ASHGABAT 1097

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Classified By: CHARGE RICHARD E. HOAGLAND FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: No progress was made on registration of the Roman Catholic Church during the recent visit of two Vatican officials to Turkmenistan. Only one of the sought after meetings with Turkmen officials took place. The Minister of Justice, during that meeting, affirmed that there is no way around the requirement that the head of a church must be a Turkmen citizen in order to register -- the main stumbling block. Since the Catholic Church is able to fully function here without registration, the main concern for the Turkmen may be setting a precedent by allowing a foreigner to head a religious organization. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) No progress was made on the issue of registration of the Roman Catholic Church during the visit of two Vatican officials December 9-16. Archbishop Antonio Lucibello, the Apostolic Nuncio to Turkmenistan (resident in Ankara), and Archbishop Luigi Travaglino from the Vatican's Secretariat of State came for the opening of the UN Preventive Diplomacy Center (septel). Lucibello stayed longer to mark the 10th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Turkmenistan and the Holy See. While those two events were the official reasons for their visit, they had very much hoped to discuss with Turkmenistan officials the long-standing problem of Church registration (reftel).

13. (C) According to local nunciature officials, the only meeting Lucibello was able to get (Travaglino had to depart December 12 before any meeting was scheduled) was with the Ministry of Justice, the body responsible for the registration of religious organizations and groups. In the MOJ meeting, Lucibello said it should not be so difficult for the Turkmenistan government to register the Catholic church because it already has relations with the Vatican. He stressed that theirs was not an ordinary Embassy, but quite openly was here to serve the Catholic community. Lucibello

asked if there was any way to reach a compromise on the legal requirement that the head of the church must be a citizen of Turkmenistan. Minister of Justice Marat Garryev replied "the law is the law," and there is not much that could be done about it.

14. (C) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs turned down a request for a meeting. Although Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Rashit Meredov attended the dinner marking the 10th anniversary of bilateral relations, nothing substantive was discussed there.

15. (C) Lucibello told EmbOff the Catholic Church had previously tried to sweeten the registration deal by offering training in the construction trades to Turkmen youth. The Turkmenistan government replied such training was not needed.

(COMMENT: The mainly Turkish and French construction companies bring in employees almost exclusively from abroad. Since it would be cheaper and more efficient to hire local staff, the only logical explanation for the practice of hiring from abroad is that Turkmen lack the skills to work in construction on the level demanded by foreign companies. END COMMENT.)

16. (C) COMMENT: Although there has been no progress on registration, the Catholic Church is able to function openly and without problems. There are two masses on Sunday (English and Russian), attracting about 100 congregants. The church holds regular classes for potential converts. According to one priest, neither members nor potential converts are harassed by the security services. Students are sent to Poland to study, and pilgrims travel to shrines in Europe (Lourdes) and to Rome, where one group had an audience with the Pope. The Turkmen may be more concerned about setting a precedent by allowing a foreigner to head a

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religious organization than anything the Catholic Church may do in Turkmenistan. END COMMENT.  
HOAGLAND